

LAMENTATIONS

Issue 75

The next two months are very difficult for us as mothers and fathers. Since the deaths of our children, Mother's Day and Father's Day have a new meaning, We "celebrate" being a parent, but we are reminded that we are no longer able to parent the child(ren) that has died, And aren't you weary of hearing "Haven't you gotten over that yet?" That was the child that I held in my anus and could physically love. We no longer have that physical child that gave us the title of "Mother" or "Father" NO!! I'm not going to get over it!"

Allison Zelinski wrote:

Tell Me How long should I grieve for my child? Who measures my love? Who measures my pain? Who has the right?

No word in the English language describes those who have lost a child. We are, simply, "The Bereaved." Pain and longing overwhelm us, defying description, when our child dies. We use words like "numb," "in shock" and "anguished," but these are just words, woefully inadequate to measure our pain. With time the pain does diminish, but never ever disappears. Instead, the pain attacks, lying in wait for an unsuspecting moment, popping up in unexpected comers. Day and night, we never escape it; it is always there, lurking, waiting to capture us in unexpected moments. A thoughtless comment, a similarly named child, a child who laughs just so, resurrects our pain and our longing, inescapable and unintentionally cruel.

In an attempt to comfort us, well intentioned people say to those of us who have lost a child: "You can have others." So? I want THAT one!! Children

are not toys, replaceable like the batteries that run them. "He died quickly, that's a blessing." Huh?? "Be glad you have other kids who are healthy," they tell me. Of course I'm glad!! I appreciate my living children, and their gifts, every moment of the day Does that make my other child's death any less painful? "You'll be stronger in the end" In the end of what? How strong do we have to be?

People say, "Hey, how are you?" Do they really want to know? Do they want to hear of our pain and longing for what we will never have again? My love for my living children is deep, all encompassing, and forever. Why is it so strange, then, that my love for my child who has died has an equal claim on my heart?

The deep and darkening silence from friends and family reveals that 'those who love us do not understand the ongoing nature of our loss. , They cannot face our pain and anguish, nor can they face us. If they faced it, they would realize that it could well happen to them, which is a pain too deep for them to bear, There, but for the grace of God, goes the rest of the world

My son could have been a stillbirth. He could have died in a house fire or a car accident. He died of Meningococcal Meningitis. In the whole scheme of things, the manner of his death is less important than that he lived, and died yet, friends and family tell me that it is time to "get on" with my life.

I have tried to "get on." Waking up in the morning, isn't that "getting on"? I eat, and sleep and work; I teach and play with my surviving children. I laugh and cry with them and kiss their "owes," I AM "getting on" with life. Does "getting on" mean I cannot miss my firstborn son? He of the curly red hair,

dimple, and smile that could brighten a cloudy day, whose laughter rang bells in my heart?

The death of our children does not mean we no longer love them or miss them. We will always grieve for what we no longer have and will never have again. The Bereaved grieve also for what might have been, Our children will not ride a bike, eat a sno-cone, get kissed. They will never know the joy of marriage and bearing children. My surviving children will reach these milestones and are a constant reminder that my child who died will not. How then, do I "get on?"

The death of a child leaves a hole in our lives forever; We step over and around the hole. On some days we jump over the hole or can pass by it with hardly a glance; on other days we fall into it. The truth is, that hole cannot be filled, it is unique, one of a kind. Tell me, how can we "get on" if we keep falling into the hole?

My grief is a measure of my love for my child; you cannot tell me to stop loving him, nor can you tell me to stop grieving him, to "get over it," I will not say his name to you if it bothers you, but neither do you ignore that I had' that child and loved him. Acknowledge that he lived and filled a purpose in this world; allow me to grieve as I need and accept my grief without judging its length or breadth

Acknowledge my child Acknowledge my grief Acknowledge my right to decide how long and how hard I will love my living children, and how long, and how hard I will love and grieve for the son who died. And never ever forget that my son also LIVED!

*When you are sorrowful, look again in your heart, and you shall see that, in truth, you are weeping for **That** which has been your delight*

-Kahlil Gibran

May is **National Suicide Prevention Month**. Many people who are involved in the area of bereavement prefer the term "completing suicide" rather than "committing suicide" because the term "committed suicide" implies that that person has committed an act that is criminal.

According to Norman Vincent Peale in his book, When Someone Takes His Own Life, "our reaction to the one who has completed suicide should be that of love and pity, not of condemnation. Perhaps the person was not thinking clearly in his/her final moments; perhaps he/she was so driven by emotional whirlwinds that he/she was incapable of thinking at all. This is terribly sad, but surely it is understandable.

My heart goes out to those who are left behind; because I know they suffer terribly...The immediate family of the victim is left wide open to tidal waves of guilt. They ask themselves, 'What did I fail to do that I should have done? What did I do that was wrong?'

To such grieving persons I can only say, 'Lift up your heads and your hearts. Surely you did your best. And surely the loved one who is gone did his/her best, for as long as he/she could. Remember, now, that his/her battles and torments are over. Do not judge him/her, and do not presume to fathom the mind of God where this one of His children is concerned.'

The Reverend Wes Stephens gave the following analogy when conducting a funeral service for a young man who had completed suicide:

Our friend died on his own battle field. He was killed in action fighting a civil war. He fought against adversaries that were as real to him as his casket is real to us. They were powerful adversaries. They took toll of his energies and endurance. They exhausted the last vestiges of his courage and his strength. At last these adversaries overwhelmed him. And it appeared that he had lost the war. But did he? I see a

host of victories that he has won!

For one thing - he has won our admiration - because even if he lost the war, we give him credit for his bravery on the battlefield. And we give him credit for the courage and pride and hope that he used as his weapons as long as he could. We shall remember not his death, but his daily victories gained through his kindness and thoughtfulness, through his love for his family and friends...for all things beautiful, lovely, and honorable. We shall remember not his last day of defeat, but we shall remember the many days that he was victorious over overwhelming odds. We shall remember not the years we thought he had left, but the intensity with which he lived the years that he had. Only God knows what this child of His suffered in the silent skirmishes that took place in his soul. But our consolation is that God does know, and understands.

If your child has completed suicide, your grieving process will differ in that you will have the added burden of understanding the motivation for the death, and your grieving process will be of longer duration.

In Carol Staudacher's book, Beyond Grief, A Guide for Recovering from the Death of a Loved One, she states the following:

It is vital to understand that suicide is not solely the result of some sudden, bizarre impulse; nor is it one single act which can be isolated and analyzed without examining the whole life context in which it occurred. Further, the cause of suicide cannot be studied from any single perspective. This final life taking act is part of a process. It has at its base, long-standing conditions which arise in varying degrees from psychic, social and cultural factors.

Barbara D. Rosof wrote, The Worst Loss, How Families Heal from the Death of a Child. Ms. Rosof talked of the "stigma" attached to suicide and the cloud of fear, disapproval and humiliation that surrounds a child's taking of their life:

Distracted with pain and grief, parents still find themselves agonizing

about what people will think of their child and of them.

You will find that suicide frightens people, makes them uncomfortable. Friends may avoid you, or avoid the subject, or offer perfunctory, painfully brief condolences. As you talk with people, you may have to pave the way for them with a statement such as "John died last month. He took his own life. "As painful as your news is to tell, most people are likely to be relieved that you can speak of it.

Your child's death deals a massive blow to the whole family. Everyone is injured; no one is spared. Every one of you-parents, brothers, sisters--feels responsible for the death, feels guilty, feels a failure. You all face the task of making sense of your loss, understanding what happened, finding a way to go on. You have the capacity to help each other. But to help, you must hear each other's pain and share your own.

Your child's suicide will be with you all your life. That you cannot change. But other parents have said that the pain gradually decreases and their hope for their lives returns.

No matter the age of your child or the nature of their death, parents who felt they were healing focused on these principles:

- allow yourself to feel what you feel*
- trust your own timetable for healing*
- believe that you will not always feel like this*
- connect with other people*
- allow all your feelings to emerge*
- realize that you cannot always help your partner or your children*
- expect an emotional roller coaster*
- assume that you will have to educate other people. You have enough work just to hold yourself together. You shouldn't have to coach others, but you must. For every friend and relative who can move to your side gracefully, there are two more who will reach out to you only if you reach out first.*

If you would like a list of books which are specifically geared to parents who have lost a child to suicide, please let me know. It is so important that we know and understand our grief.

Grief Grafts

G.B. and Carolyn Bowman's three children, Ashley (4-23-87), Courtney (4-8-84), and Daniel (3-17-79) died from an automobile accident, 6-24-96. The following article written by Wade Holland, appeared in the *Barbourville Mt. Advocate*, with photos of GB & Carolyn with all of their children:

During the summer of 1996, G.B. and Carolyn Bowman had an ideal family. Seventeen year old son Daniel Brooks, already planning on becoming a veterinarian, was entering his junior year of high school at Lynn Camp while his sisters, 12 year old Courtney Leigh and 9 year old Ashley Elizabeth, were two of the brightest students at West Knox Middle School, not to mention all star athletes with championship credentials.

But the world came crashing down on G.B. and Carolyn on June 24 of that year when a tragic automobile accident claimed the lives of all three children, robbing the family of its most precious members. G.B. suffered fractured ribs and a collapsed lung in the accident, while Carolyn was a little more seriously injured with a broken back and leg. The two survived, but not without being scarred for life both physically and emotionally.

And while it has been three and a half years since they left this world, Daniel, Courtney and Ashley have not been forgotten. Their memory lives on in several places, including Lynn Camp High School where the Lady Wildcats' basketball team holds an annual tournament in honor of the three. There are also two trees planted at West Knox Middle School and the Bowman Children Memorial Scholarship at Cumberland College has been established.

Daniel, who would have been 20 years old today, was an animal lover who also liked to hunt and fish. Being the first born son, he had a special bond with his mother.

"Daniel had a special smile," said his mother. "He loved the outdoors and outdoors things. He was all boy, that is for sure." Not much on sports after middle school, Daniel focused most of

his attention on his first love-the outdoors. But he never stopped participating in sports, playing in a men's softball game with his father the day of his death.

Courtney had no trouble in the classroom, excelling in every subject to the point that she was a member of the school's Gifted and Talented Program for exceptionally talented students. She was able to make all A's in the classroom despite participating in as many as three sports at one time.

"Courtney had a drive that you would not believe," said Carolyn. "And it wasn't just in sports; It was in everything she did. She never wanted to miss a day of school. And if she came home from a ball game or practice and it was late, she wouldn't go to bed until she finished her homework"

As an athlete Courtney proved to be one of the best in the state at a very young age when she was the 10-year-old state champion at the Optimist Tri-Star Basketball Competition. She took third one other year and got her first glimpse of high school basketball as a member of Lynn Camp's junior varsity squad as a sixth grader.

While sports were a part of her life, Courtney had her priorities in order.

"Sports were almost as important to her as her grades. Courtney took her sports seriously and she was very competitive, even with the boys. In most cases she could outdo boys her age. "

Ashley, who looked up to Courtney, was very similar as a person in many ways. She was following in her sister's footsteps, getting nothing but A's in the classroom while tearing up the competition on the playing field. During the 1995-96 school years, Ashley teamed with Courtney on a very successful West Knox basketball team as well as Lynn Camp's Middle School team.

Ashley was also a champion locally at the Optimist Tri-Star Basketball Competition. But she will likely be remembered most for her kindness.

"Ashley was very friendly. She never met a stranger. She always had a kind word and always wanted to do something to help someone. "

Ashley's third grade teacher, Vickie Jackson, also remembered her as a very likable youth.

"Ashley was always smiling. She was a very happy kid," said Jackson. "She got along very well with others. And she loved to dress-up. She was quite the little lady. "

Jackson also recalls Ashley caring very much about her grandmother, Oda Bargo of Williamsburg,

"Ashley was very proud of her grandmother. She even wrote a story about her grandmother that year, "said Jackson.

The Bowman's were a very close knit family at all times before the accident. G.B. and Carolyn made time to be at all ball games and academic meets. And fishing with daddy was one of the children's favorite times.

While Carolyn admits that the pain has gotten easier over the years, Carolyn is quick to point out that it is something she will never forget about.

"It is something you never, never get over," she said. "Sometimes people say to you that you get over it in time. But you don't."

Holidays are very rough times around the Bowman house since 1996. But it doesn't compare to March 17, April 8 and April 23 we, the birthdays of the three children. The anniversary of the accident is also a very hurtful day for the Bowman family.

"There is never an hour goes by that they aren't on my mind," said Carolyn, who still seeks an answer to the question "Why?"

"Why did this happen to my three children? Why did that happen to me?

That has been really hard for me. I guess at first I wanted to blame God.

Why did God let this happen? And why did God let it happen to my three who had so much to offer and give back to the community? And why did God spare the mother and father and take our children? I really can't understand why we were spared. And of course there really are no answers.

I feel like my kids lives were cut short. I feel they have been cheated. They could have contributed so much. "

After suffering through more than two years of agony without their children, G.B. and Carolyn's lives were forever changed again with the birth of their fourth child, Matthew Chase Bowman, who was born April 11, 1999. The

name Matthew means 'Gift from God,' which is exactly what he is considered to be by the Bowman family.

And despite the pain that she lives with daily, Carolyn has plenty to be thankful for this Christmas besides the newest member of the family.

"I thank God that some day I'll get to see my kids again. I thank Him every day for that opportunity."

The children's symbols are angels.



The following was copied from the *Alive Alone* newsletter, a newsletter for parents who have lost an only child, or all their children. Terri Kelly wrote:

A recently bereaved parent said to me the other night. "I laughed today and I felt guilty." His son was needlessly murdered just a short six months ago because the cash register his son was responsible for held no more than \$20.00.

I didn't know quite how to answer him. My son was murdered just over two years ago and I still occasionally feel guilt when I revel in the joy of being in love, or the beautiful sunset, or laugh with new friends, or chuckle at one of the myriad of jokes my son's friends and I tell about him.

Because I laugh and joke and tease about what my son may not be doing now, others are sometimes appalled at what they perceive as my lack of respect for those no longer with us. I long ago stopped trying to explain that it is not a lack of respect for my son or anyone else.

It is rather a stubborn refusal to become defined by death and an acknowledgment that my son would be making the same irreverent jokes about me.

Laughter is healthy. Humor is therapy. They are simply another coping mechanism.

Some days I cannot stop crying not necessarily on birthdays that no longer are or death days that loom.

I have no idea why. Some days I can't cry, even on those non-birthdays or horrid anniversaries. There is simply no rhyme or reason to it, just as there is no rhyme or reason to why we have to outlive our children.

When is it all right to cry?
Whenever we feel like it.

When is it all right to smile and laugh? Whenever we feel like it.

When is it all right to feel guilty because we cry or laugh - never!!!

We cry because we hurt, because we are human, because we love and miss our children. If we start crying in the middle of a grocery store because we see a special on his/her favorite cereal - so what? I don't know about others, but I am long past caring what strangers think.

We laugh because we can sometimes see through the dark clouds and remember our children's laughter.

We laugh when we remember the silly things they used to do. We laugh because we can hear their voices saying, "MOMMM, you're embarrassing me again." We laugh because our children taught us how and because they would never forgive us if we stopped laughing and enjoying life.

I miss my son terribly. I will always miss my son terribly. I would gladly trade my life for his, if I had that choice. When I laugh, it does not mean I miss him less than others miss their children. When I smile at simple joys like thunderstorms, it does not mean I am "in denial" about my son's death.

When I cry, it does not mean I am no longer coping.

Never be afraid to express your emotions. Never feel guilt over finding humor or joy. After all, losing a child means never again having to say you're sorry for anything you do.

Terri's only son, Patrick (3-25-74), was murdered in Mexico 5-11-96. Terri is a single parent.

Earl and Carol Sias' son, Greg (9-29-77), was killed in an auto accident, 11-5-97. Carol shares:

According to the calendar, spring marks the end of winter. Thus, is heralded the beginning of the end of dark days and stark landscapes. It is the beginning of the arrival of blooming bulbs, flowers, leaves, butterflies, and hummingbirds. The songs of the birds take on a different tone. Spring is a time of rebirth, of colorful blooms that explode in delicate colors of yellows,

pinks, blues, lavenders, purple and white. Their arrival also softly and gently announces the new season and the return of life after the long winter months. The trees that have been naked and silhouetted against the cloudy sky again show signs of life with the tender light green leaves that quickly make their appearance.

Spring is a time of new beginnings. We see evidence of that everywhere we look except in the hearts of parents whose children had died. There, the cold brutal winter continues to reside. We try as we can to appreciate the colors of spring and the once happy feelings they instilled in us. We grieving parents don't feel any semblance of exuberance for the new season in the early years of our children's deaths. We saw the end of our happiness, joy, and new beginnings when our children died.

Soon, the sound of lawn mowers, edgers, weed eaters, chain saws, and the smell of fertilizer and freshly cut grass will fill the air. As far as I think of this being the time for puttering in the yard and taking time to pay attention to the gardens. It seems the first things to take off are the weeds. Weeds seem to be able to live through the most extreme circumstances; drought, frozen temperatures, scalding heat, blustering winds, downpours of rain and whatever other extremes in the weather that arise. Not even insects can kill them. I look at the daffodils scattered through the yard and gardens. The bright yellow flowers that bloom early on soon turn to white powder puffs that blow about in the wind.

The Tennessee soil at our house is rock and clay. It requires a battle plan in the war against the annoying weeds. Each of the four years here, I have pulled, dug, sprayed and sworn at those tenacious green plants that all too quickly grow out of control.

I suppose that I could look at the war against the weeds as my battle against the forces that have torn my life apart. Thus far, my vengeance against the taproots of the more tenacious weeds is a battle lost, because I can never seem to gain control of them. I don't want to lose the war against the weeds nor the same war I battle against

the grief that I feel to the root of my heart and soul.

Instead of giving way with just a gentle pull, the unwanted plants that spread like the plague, have to be dug, prodded, and loosened in order to get the earth to release them.

How does all of this relate to the death of a child? The forces that I speak of have names. They are called pain, agony, despair, hopelessness, lack of understanding, fear, regret, loss, anger, denial, and guilt. The list seems as though it could go on without end.

Just as a gardener rids the gardens of one species of weeds, another species pops out of the ground. It is a never-ending battle that will last as long as we live in the presence of a yard and gardens.

As I am attempting to dig out the unwanted greenery, again swearing at them all the while, I think of the hurt the anger, the disappointment, the stolen future, the shattered dreams, and the awful pain that continue to fester and grow inside of me.

No matter how hard I try to control the unwanted things, they continue to multiply in staggering numbers. How do I learn to take control of the sad tragic events of my life? I am trying daily to learn the answers. Still before me is the afternoon at the hospital when they brought in the lifeless wounded body of my son, the image of him dead in the morgue, the funerals, and the days after. They will always be there. My hope is that in time, they will fall into the recesses of my mind and the smiling face and priceless memories will take their place.

My fear of forgetting is so intense it takes my breath away. It seems a daily prayer for me to say, "Oh, God, please don't let the memories be taken from me, too." It seems as though the harder I concentrate on remembering my child's life, the more the curtain is lowered between those elusive memories and me. I plead with God over and over to restore the memories lost and to cement the rest in my mind. The past, the memories, the pictures drawn and notes written by growing hands as well as material possessions and other tributes of Greg's presence are all that we have left.

The Spring flowers have cycles. Some of those flowers come from the trees; some emerge from under the earth. Conversely, the mines and traps of grief come from anywhere at anytime. Rather than flower petals floating down from the trees and the beauty and the joy of spring, I feel the stark darkness of the chasm of my agony and overwhelming sense of loss.

Greg had planned to design and help me with the gardens and to refresh the existing ones with bright colors and beautiful flowers that I could cut and use for fragrant bouquets in the house. There would also be special plants and flowers that would attract humming birds and butterflies. He wanted for this to be a project that would allow us some special creative time together and as his gift for me for Mother's Day. It never happened because of the accident that stole him from me. The gardens for the most part this last year were in a state of neglect with the exception of weeding. The bushes that he had trimmed in the fall still retained the shape that he gave them. Instead of planning the spring gardens last year, we as a family began to plan Greg's memorial garden and grave site in the back of our property. It is going to be a place dedicated to Greg and to other children that have lost their lives too soon. Greg would not want a garden marked only for him. He had always wanted to include others in his life and it is only fitting that others be included in a place dedicated to his death.

I have strained to remember all of the flowers and plants that he said we should plant and where he said they should go. The only thing I can remember at this point, is Sweet William to be planted under the largest maple tree in the front yard. He had said that it would thrive heartily under the conditions of the weather, light and soil. He knew that I had had a difficult time getting anything to grow in that spot. He and I had spent time together walking throughout the yard while he told me what he would like to do for and with me. He had learned a great deal about landscaping while enjoying a part time job in doing so on a golf course. This spring I intend to attempt to regain control of the gardens in the same way I am trying to regain control

of my life and the pleasures that it can hold. Finding Sweet William has become a quest.

I have felt a lot like Don Quixote on a quest that takes me into a battle with windmills. The windmills represent the emotions I related earlier in my entry of today. I have always been a survivor in the past and I intend to fight the battle for as long as it takes or as long as I am alive, whichever comes first. It is so easy to want to give up but the other seasons of the year are dependent on spring cycling through with its breath of life into the year.

I have seen the beginnings of the mums' return in the garden in front of the house. Greg, my husband, and I had planted them at night two falls ago by the light of the moon and a flashlight, which was my job to hold. The return of these plants again this spring, represents a small part of a legacy left by a young man that should have outlived us. The little pine tree that volunteered early in the winter is still living and has begun to grow. It is in a most awkward place next to the steps that terrace up the yard to the front door. It is a puzzle, because we do not have any pine trees in the area that we live. It survived the winter and as soon as it gets a little better foothold I will transplant it into a place of honor in our yard. Could it be a sign from Greg that something good and unexpected or unexplained can appear when life seems its darkest? In my heart I hope it to be so.

Greg's symbols are "I RULE," skate board, yin yang, music and a helping hand.



Tim (6-17-67), the son of Harold and Norma Smith, was murdered, 5-19-82. Norma shares:

Our life has turned upside down again. Our son, Jim, and his wife have divorced. It was so quick and unexpected. I was sick all over. It was another death, and yet it wasn't.

It has been so strange. One day she was here celebrating her birthday, and a few days later, she was gone. Not a word to us, no good-bye, nothing. They have been divorced since December, '99 and I still miss her. I have heard a

divorce is second only to a death. It surely is so, but I'm coping. Our son is back home for awhile. He needed us and we always need him.

I started making candles a year ago in April and I am so pleased with the results. There is much to learn, yet it is wonderful to see this thing which I have created with a little imagination. I have been making a Memory Candle, and it is a six-pointed star; blue for boys or men, and pink for girls or women. Each have a gold or silver band encircling the bottom to remind us of God's arms holding our loved ones.

My mind drifts everywhere; remembering that this band we share, like the beautiful poem says, "we need each other in order to be stronger." Though God is our main stay, He does send compassionate friends into our lives to brighten our day.

You have shared so much, been so nice, that I hope if there is ever a chocolate spill that it will be on Main Street in Williamsburg, Call us right away. Knowing my husband, he would air-lift me to it.

May all our loads be lighter in 2000.



Tim's symbols are a football, baseball and choir boy.

If you are interested in a candle, you may call Norma at 606-679-2919 or write her at:

171 Jewell St.
Somerset, KY 42501

Janna (6-1-82), the daughter of Gregg and Linda Miller, died 2-27-92. Linda shares two blessings the family has received this past year:

Gregg and I have been particularly blessed this year by two things - a piece of choral music written in Janna's memory and a memorial scholarship fund established in her memory.

"I Know That My Redeemer Lives" was written by Craig Courtney at our request When he and I discussed it, we agreed that we would pray and let the Holy Spirit dictate the text, melody, etc. After 18 months the piece was

complete. I love the blending of the two texts that speak of our confidence in Christ our Redeemer, and yet which admit to our desperate bewilderment in the face of personal tragedy. I don't understand - I will never understand but I know Christ the Redeemer - and for now, that's all I need to know.

This year, 2000, would have been Janna's senior year in high school. We established the memorial scholarship fund this year, so that one of her former classmates would receive the first **Janna Miller Memorial Scholarship**. The criteria state that the recipient must have attended Janna's elementary school and be graduating from the district high school, must be accepted to a four-year college or university, and must possess a godly character. We are eager to see who receives this first scholarship. I anticipate that as we present the award, my heart will be filled with the mix of agony and elation. It is such a familiar emotion now, it should have its own name... "joygony" (Isn't this a great word?)

Janna loved basketball. Her number was #5.



Wayne and Denise Brashear's son, Tim (12-17-72) died 10-20-93. The following poem was written by Denise 12-19-99 and was sent in the family's Christmas card:

Nothing is more precious than our love for one another.

Nothing is more dear than the time we give to others. Nothing is more meaningful than when we bow our head in prayer, to thank our Father above for his blessings and his care.

Nothing is more humble than a soul who has found Christ...

Nothing can compare to God's Gift of Eternal life.

Tim's symbols are an 18-wheeler and a rainbow.



Windle and Wanda Thompson's son, Tracy, died. 10-20-97. He was

a track star at Cumberland. The family shares:

I often think of Cumberland College and all the people there. I'm so thankful that God permitted Tracy to attend that college and I'm also thankful that his life was touched by so many there. It still seems so unreal that it could be, 2 years already since Tracy went home to be with the Lord. We miss him so very much and sometimes the loss, seems unbearable but I know deep down God has a plan. I take the angel out quite often and it does ease the pain some and I do thank you again. I will never forget your love and kindness for us. I pray the new year will bring you love, peace, joy and no heartaches or trouble. And if they do come, my prayer is that God will keep you and your family wrapped in his love and understanding until we all can stand in His presence. Then we'll know why our heartaches had to come. Keep us always in your prayers because our family must face a lot of trials this coming year. Pray that He gives us the strength and love that we need Especially me, for I feel like I'm so far away from Him.

God Bless You and Yours!

Tracy was loved by all who knew him at Cumberland.



Jay Crim (5-23-74) is the son of Keith and Becky LaVey and died in his sleep, 1-17-99. Becky lamented:

This first year has been extremely difficult, as you very well know. Losing a child is the worst thing that can happen to anyone. My heart goes out to all of the parents who have lost more than one child and to those (like you) who had an only child who passed away. Andrew my 1st grandson was born two days after Jay passed away. My daughter Cyndy (19, Andrew's mother) went into labor the night her brother passed away (from being so upset). Cyndy wasn't due until the last day of January, so he was only a few weeks early. However, Andrew had to have surgery the day he was born, because his intestines were outside of his

body. He was in surgery 3 hours, and was in intensive care for 6 weeks. The day after the baby was born I was finally able to go to the funeral home to make the arrangements for Jay. After I left the funeral home, I went to an outpatient surgery center to have surgery on my wrist. I had broken both bones in my wrist the weekend before Jay passed away. This was really a blessing in disguise, because J had stayed home from work that week (from pain), and spent more time with Jay than I had for a long time. Little did I know that was the last week of his life. We had a great week. He waited on me, prepared me food and even rolled my hair (you cannot roll your hair with one hand). He cooked his favorite meal, sloppy joes and green beans. He brought me some, but I couldn't eat the sloppy joes because he added too much hot sauce to it. Jay and I visited Walmart the night before he died to buy him school supplies. (The week before he had just started school at KY Vocational School seeking a degree in Medical Transcription). While we were at Walmart he talked me into buying him some clothes that were on sale. I hesitated because I had just bought him some nice clothes at Christmas. But Jay was very persuasive and did talk me into a black shirt and a green and black winter vest to wear with the shirt. He picked out his school supplies and was very pleased with what he found, because he wanted to be "professional." The next day around 12:00 p.m. we found Jay dead. He had died in his sleep, and we, the paramedics, and the emergency room doctors were unable to resuscitate him.

The day after my wrist surgery we had Jay's visitation at the funeral home, and the next day, his funeral. I have been asked many times this year how I survived that week: Jay's death,

Cyndy's labor, Andrew's surgery, my surgery, then Jay's visitation and funeral. God gave me strength. What is amazing to me is that I have survived this past year. I am still alive and finally I am beginning to feel some peace! I want to share with you what I have just begun to realize the past few days. I am a school social worker at a public high school in Lexington. I work in a dropout prevention program

within the school, called Project Transition. My primary job responsibility is counseling students as well as parents. This includes grief counseling. I have been doing this for 8 years. This school year I became a part of our county-wide Crisis Response Team. The Crisis Response Team enters a school when a death(s) of students have occurred to help students cope. I have responded to 3 different schools this year because of the deaths of 4 students. Besides counseling the students, I have had the unique opportunity of meeting with the deceased students' parents. I have just realized that because I am a fellow traveler this is what God wants me to do. To be able to help these extremely hurting parents in some small way is a blessing to me. I have a new purpose and mission from God. And you have been such a good example and inspiration to me. I have had many angels reach out to me this past year and you are on the top of the list for a caring, loving and empathetic companion. I cannot put into words my gratitude towards you.

I have also been attending the Bluegrass Chapter of the Compassionate Friends since last April. This group of bereaved parents are indeed "compassionate friends." This support group has helped me a lot, and I highly recommend this support group to all bereaved parents. I wanted to share with you my new "purpose." I know God has cared for me this past year and now he is leading me. Please pray for me to be able to comfort these bereaved parents and to shine some ray of hope upon their darkness. And I know I am still healing myself, so keep me in your prayers as well.

Jay's symbol is a



boxer.

Richard and Geraldine Price's son, Richard (6-6-79), died in an auto accident, 12-18-98. Geraldine shares:

It has been a most difficult year. My husband just could not cope with the loss of our son. He struggled for months but finally ended up in the hospital in September. He was there for six weeks being treated for grief and severe depression. It was a very

difficult time for Jamie and me. However, his hospital stay was necessary. He is still taking anti depressants sleeping pills and for a while, had seemed to be doing a bit better. However, about a week or so before Christmas he began to regress.

He seems so restless; like he's looking for something that he can't find and I guess we both know what searching for.

I also found it very difficult dealing with the fact that in the previous years, every time I went to St. John's Richard was there and now he isn't

Over the summer my husband did manage, with the help of his brother-in-law, to build a bench on a walking trail not far from our home. It was dedicated in memory of Richard. They did a lovely job with it. Richard spent much time on that trail on his dirt bike dune buggy and ski-doo.

(Geraldine sent a picture of "Peach Light" which has been placed on Richard's grave. It is a solar powered cross-shaped light that gives off radiant red glow at night. If you are interested, you can telephone; 1-800-444-1429 or Fax, 605-996-591

The holidays were very difficult again this year. I know this is our second year without Richard but his absence seemed so much more real this year. I guess last year this time" were still in shock. We put 3 crosses on the side of the road where the accident happened. My husband made the crosses out of stainless steel. He put a small plaque on each cross with Richard's, Stirling's and Dale's names on them, along with their ages and death date. We also placed flowers by each cross.

Richard's symbols are a car, a



wrench, and a stereo.

Michael (6-30-76), the son of Michael and Linda Miller, died from a truck accident, 2-15-95. Michael (father) wrote this last year:

I want to thank you very much for the card and remembering us on

February 15. We did not get any other cards or phone calls from family or friends. I feel like everyone has pushed Michael D. away and forgot about him. I got very discouraged with our Christmas letter I sent out about 75 to close friends who knew Michael D. very well and to family. In their letters we asked them to send us their favorite memory of Michael D. I was so excited about compiling all the memories. Well guess what? We got responses from only 3 people. We did not hear from any family member. I don't know if I am wrong or not but I have just been crushed over this. At this point I don't feel like I will ever send out another Christmas letter.

Michael and I express our memories of Michael Duncan in different ways. Michael loves to write poems about Michael Duncan. The following are two of the poems he has written. We had a dear friend put one of his poems to music and made it into a song. Michael Duncan touched so many people in so many different ways. We still deal with his loss every day. Michael Duncan was a great kid and we want to keep his memory alive in every possible way.

A Sixth Sense

It is said that everyone has five senses. They are sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. We use various combinations of these senses to experience the world around us. But, I know that there is a sixth sense. A sense we use for experiencing, exploring, and surviving another world. Not a tangible realm, like the physical world, and not imaginary, but very real.

We all visit this realm at one time or another, but some of us go there more often than others. Sometimes it is a comforting place, warm and safe. Sometimes it is an uncertain place cast in shadows. And, sometimes it can be a cruel place, bleak and harsh.

This intangible realm is the world that lies inside each one of us. It is the place where we hide our secrets, cherish our memories, and seek shelter from our fears. No single sense or combination of our senses can reach this place. It takes a sixth sense to venture there. A sense known to no other organism on the planet except man. That is our sense of love. Most will say that love is an emotion. I believe the

sense of love is the driving source of our emotions.

I believe we love in different ways. I don't love a cheeseburger in the same way that I love my wife. I also believe our sense of love allows us to use our other senses when we visit this realm within ourselves. Let's look at Michael Duncan.

I can't see Michael anymore with my eyes. Yet, in my mind's eye I can see him as a baby. I can see him as an Eagle Scout. I can see him playing football.

I can't hear Michael anymore with my ears. Yet, when I listen with my heart I can hear him. I can hear his strong voice. I can hear him laugh. I can hear him say "Daddy" again.

I can't feel Michael anymore with my hands. Yet, my love's sense of touch lets me feel him. I feel his warm touch on my arm. I feel his strong arms around me. I can feel his kiss on my cheek.

I can't smell Michael anymore with my nose. Yet, my love's sense of smell lets me catch his scent. I can smell his aftershave before going on a date. I can smell his scent on his clothes every time I open his closet.

I can't taste Michael anymore with my Ups. Yet, my love's sense of taste lets me taste him. I can taste the soft saltiness of his skin when I kiss him.

For all of this, I believe the sixth sense of love is the strongest sense of all.

Love Daddy

Gone fishin'

I went fishing today, the first time since you've gone.

It felt strange and lonely.

It felt very wrong.

The lake was the same and the sun shone so bright.

The pole felt the same, but the day wasn't right.

So, I sat down to ponder what I already knew.

The day wasn't right 'cause I didn't have you.

I sat down and prayed, "Lord, what do I do?"

But, the Lord didn't answer.

He left that to you.

I felt, more than heard, the answer you gave.

You said, "Like you taught me, you have to be brave."

"Don't look around for I won't be there.

But, look in your heart, you know just where. "

"I'm right here with you like I always have been.

I'll always be with you. I won't leave again. "

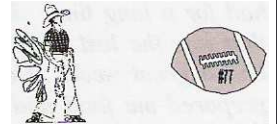
So, I picked myself up, this day to enjoy.

And started in fishing, just me and my boy.

I miss you.

I love you

DADDY



Michael's symbols are a cowboy angel, a football, and the #77.

Dr. John and Bernice Renfro's son, Elwin (1-1) was killed in an automobile accident, 7-20-99. Elwin's younger sister, Rhonda, wrote this poem to him (Snake is Elwin's nickname):

"SNAKE"

(Elwin's nickname)

Wish the angels could let me know
Why your days here had to end
I wish the angels would have prepared
me so
My broken heart could begin to mend
The emptiness that I continually feel,
the memories that flood my mind
The sadness and sorrow is impossible
to heal
The regret I have for the loss of time
How ironic that you survived your
surgery ordeal
All the pain and suffering you endured
To be taken so suddenly in an automobile
when your heart was on the road to being
cured
My big brother, the eldest one I remember
our childhood days
The family namesake, the first born son
How we laughed, fought, teased and
played
You taught me how to drive a five
speed car
You spoke to me about boys and their
ways
You took me to my first concert and bar
You guided me through my adolescent
days

*All the talents you mastered, the short
time you were here
Music, gadgets, and cars you loved
I guess the angels felt they needed you
near
Are you playing your music in the
heavens above?
You are greatly missed by family and
friends
But we find comfort in this final
thought
Your pain and suffering has come to an
end
You now have the peace that you had
always sought.*

Bob and Teresa Hartzel's son, Scott (6-19-83) died in an auto driven by his girl friend on 1-9-00. Scott's teacher, Mrs. Ashford, wrote this poem and the family is having it engraved on his tombstone:

*It is a deep mystery,
This matter of life and death...
That the same person who brought
us a thousand joys,
Can one day leave us, shedding a
thousand tears.
So suddenly sometimes that we
grope blindly for words left unspoken
or the hug we needed to give to say
"goodbye."
And we wonder how this thread that
holds us all to life can be so thin
And fragile until one day we find
the courage to accept that the living
aren't meant to understand death, only
to celebrate life, and to remember that
the only real death is forgetting..*

Teresa tells us about Scott:

Our Scott was so full of life, his friends still stop by every day to tell us a story about him. He never had fear of anything, he loved to play football, basketball, weightlifting and little kids they all loved him. After we saw the car Scott was killed in, we realized one of Scott's purposes on earth was to save Darlene's life. Scott was not wearing a seat belt and his body was thrown in front of hers and he received all of the impact, also no alcohol was involved and Darlene only received minor injuries. The day after Scott left us was a very foggy day and my husband said Scott would be very bored today all of

a sudden the skys got bright and a rainbow appeared in the sky. There was a picture of it in the newspaper the following day. Scott's friends painted a beautiful mural, in the weightlifting room at the school, of Scott running for a touchdown toward the sky. His # was 11. I think we would like to make a rainbow Scott's symbol.



Casey, the son of Dr. Mike and Alice Caudill, was killed in an auto accident, 3-7-98. Mike is a Baptist minister and has preached many sermons talking about Casey. One was entitled "Heaven where our possessions lie!" Alice sent several tapes of Mike's sermons and stated:

I know now that there is no healing from the wounds of separation from a child The healing will come in eternity. While we are still on this earth, we need all the support and encouragement that we can get from others who care for us.

The following is an excerpt that was sent in a Christmas letter to friends:

The greatest heartache we have ever experienced came to us on March 7, 1998. We have lived this day over every day since. We truly yearn to be with Casey, to continue to share his thoughts and dreams. As those of you who knew Casey well can certainly understand, our house has drastically changed The constant antic, the playful "picking" at his sisters, the loud music, the free spirited atmosphere that surrounded him is no longer with us. The depth of which we miss him is inconceivable, even to ourselves.

Casey's spirit and soul are now in Heaven, a real, literal, physical place, a place as literal as where we stand right now. Throughout the year of 1998, my favorite most comforting words were from a book written by John R. Rice concerning heaven and when we reach it. "No doubt we saints of God will eat fruit and drink the water in real bodies. Our feet will walk upon those streets. Our hands will touch the cheeks of our loves ones. Every longing will be satisfied"

The Casey's Christian Life Scholarship was awarded to Stephen Bell This scholarship stands as a tribute to the Life and loving memory of Michael Casey Caudill, whose Christian faith and love for life will live eternally

TEARS, TALK, TIME, AND TOMORROWS

(author unknown)

I never thought I could go on living when you died, but I did

I never thought I would survive after burying you, but I did I never thought I'd get through those first days, weeks, and months, but I did

I never thought I'd be able to endure the first anniversary of your death, but I did

I never thought I'd let myself love my new grandchild, but I have.

I never thought tomorrow would be different, but it was.

I never thought I'd stop crying for a day, but I have.

I never thought I'd sing again, but I have.

I never thought the pain would 'soften', but it has.

I never thought I'd care if the sun shone again, but I do.

I never thought I'd ever entertain again, but I have.

I never thought I'd be able to control my grief, but I can

I never thought I could function without medication again, but I can

I never thought I'd smile again, but I do.

I never thought I'd laugh out loud again, but I do.

I never thought I'd look forward to tomorrow, but I do.

I never thought I'd reconcile your death, but I have.

I never thought I'd be able to create that 'new normal,' but I have.

I never thought I'd want to go on living after you died, but I do. Always missing you, always loving you, and thinking of you daily, with a smile on my face and tears on my heart.

A LESSON IN GRAMMAR

by Mary Cleckley

If you are like I---I don't want anybody to quibble with me about whether my sons birthday is or was November 20, because,

- a) it is
- b) it was, and
- c) it always will be

And, as to whether I have or had children---because,

- a) I do
- b) I did
- c) I always will have

Why Did He Die?

Why did he die? Why did he live?
 Why did he care? Why did he give?
 Why do we cry if it's all for the best?

Why wonder "why?" Why can't we rest?

They say there's a plan, though we can't see it now. But 'til we can see it, we'll remember just, "How."

How he did what he did in his own special way. How we shared in the good and the bad of each day.

How, no matter whatever may come to pass, The memories we hold in our hearts ..will last.

For no matter the answers to the questions of "why?" If he lives on in us... then he didn't die.

He lives not in vain, but left his life's mark. He lighted a candle where once there was dark.

And this is the torch, rekindled through time. His light has been added to yours and mine.

So let us continue to carry it high, Trusting that someday we'll understand "why?"

-Bruce H. Conley
 Funeral Director, Elburn, IL

A Beginning

One day you wake up and realize you must have survived it because are still here, alive and breathing. you don't remember the infinitely

small steps and decisions you took to get there. Your only awareness is that you have shed miles of tears on what seems to be an endless road of sorrow.

One day - one glorious day - you wake up and feel your skin tingle again, and you forget just for an instant that your heart is broken...and it is a beginning.

-Susan Borrowman
 TCF, Kingston, Ontario

J.I.M.'s picnic, June 10th, will be the 7th picnic and promises to be the best ever. The speaker this year will be Becky Greer. She and her husband Gam have lost all 4 of their children. Becky is a "hero" of mine and when you hear her speak, you will be blessed. She and Gam are truly "survivors."

Kathy Jo Gutsell will honor us by playing her harp. Those of you who heard her play last year will agree it was as if the angels were there with us as she played. Kathy's husband, Dr. Terry Gutsell, wrote the forward to Rosemary's book. Their son, Andrew, died 8-6-93. The two are true "soldiers" for Hospice of the Bluegrass.

I am so excited about this year's picnic. To say it will be the best is an understatement. We will have a balloon liftoff in honor of our children after the picnic and I am in the process of planning an informal candle lighting service Saturday night, for those who will be spending the night.

Rosemary has promised to sign every book, no matter how long it takes. Let's keep her busy all day!

This was sent to me... I wonder why?

Rules of Chocolate

If you have melted chocolate all over your hands - you're eating it too slowly.

Chocolate covered raisins, cherries, orange slices and strawberries

all count as fruit, so eat as many as you want.

*The problem: How to get 2 pounds of chocolate home from the store in a hot car.

The solution: Eat it in the parking lot.

*Diet tip: eat a chocolate bar before each meal. It'll take the edge off your appetite and you'll eat less.

*A nice box of chocolates can provide your total daily intake of calories in one place. Isn't that handy? And it will save a lot of time.

*If you can't eat all your chocolate, it will keep in the freezer. But if you can't eat all your chocolate, what's wrong with you, are you a wimp?

*If calories are an issue, store your chocolate on top of the fridge. Calories are afraid of heights, and they will jump out of the chocolate to protect themselves.

*If I eat equal amounts of dark chocolate and white chocolate, is that a balanced diet?

*Money talks...Chocolate sings.

*Chocolate has many preservatives. Preservatives preserve your youthful appearance.

(At least this is a good excuse)

*Why is there no such organization as "Chocoholics Anonymous? (Because no one wants to quit)

If not for chocolate, there would be no need for control top pantyhose. An entire garment industry would be devastated.

*Put "eat chocolate" at the top of your list of things to do today. That way, at least you'll get one thing accomplished.

(I have added this to the list)

*If you eat someone else's dessert, they have to count the calories because they ordered the dessert, so enjoy as much chocolate as you want!!

